

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7069

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 1226

STADIS////////

FOR NEA/ARN DRAPER

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, US, SY

SUBJ: MARRIAGE PETITIONS

REF: A) STATE 51330; B) STATE 53167

1. FOLLOWING RECEIPT OF YOUR FIRST MESSAGE I GOT IN TOUCH WITH DEPFOMIN AL-KHANI TO INFORM HIM OF THE 48 NEW PETITIONS AND QABBANI'S PROBLEM WITH CERTIFICATION. HIS FIRST REACTION WAS THAT THIS WHOLE PROGRAM WAS ONLY A PRETEXT AND THIS WAS CLEAR FROM THE FACT THAT MOST OF THE FIRST GROUP OF GIRLS WERE STILL NOT MARRIED.

2. IN ENSUING CONVERSATION I THINK I MANAGED TO IMPRESS UPON HIM SOME OF THE LARGER AND HUMANITARIAN ASPECTS OF THIS PROGRAM AND THE OVERALL FAVORABLE PUBLICITY FOR SYRIA WHICH RESULTED. AL KHANI ASKED THAT I SEND HIM AN AIDE MEMOIRE ON THE SUBJECT AND UNDERTOOK TO TAKE IT UP WITH FONMIN KHADDAM. (COMMENT: I AM NOT HAPPY WITH HIS GOING TO KHADDAM AT THIS POINT BUT DAOUDI IS IN THE GULF THIS WEEK CARRYING ASSAD MESSAGES TO THE SHEIKS; THEREFORE WE HAVE NO CHOICE.)

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EM TEXT OF AIDE MEMOIRE WHICH WAS SUBMITTED TO AL KHANI MARCH 1 FOLLOWS:

THE TREATMENT IN THE AMERICAN NEWS MEDIA, PRESS, RADIO AND TELEVISION, FOLLOWING THE ARRIVAL LAST SUMMER IN NEW YORK OF 13 SYRIAN JEWISH LADIES, MARRIED BY PROXY IN DAMASCUS, WAS UNIFORMLY FAVORABLE TO SYRIA. SINCE THEIR

ARRIVAL, THE YOUNG WOMEN HAVE BEEN STAYING IN THE HOMES OF MEMBERS OF THE SYRIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY IN BROOKLYN NEW YORK, WHERE THEY ARE BEING CAREFULLY LOOKED AFTER AND SUPERVISED. THEY HAVE ENROLLED IN COURSES OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TRAINING AND IN SOME CASES VOCATIONAL TRAINING AS WELL. THREE OF THE GROUP HAVE ALREADY BEEN FORMALLY MARRIED IN NEW YORK CITY, AND EXCEPT FOR THE TWO WHO HAVE RETURNED TO SYRIA, ALL REMAIN THERE. IT IS EXPECTED THAT THE OTHERS WILL COMPLETE FORMAL MARRIAGE CEREMONIES IN THE FUTURE.

THE QUESTION OF THE UNMARRIED WOMEN CONTINUES TO BE OF GREAT INTEREST AMONG THE AMERICAN PUBLIC AND IN CONGRESSIONAL CIRCLES. THE DELEGATIONS FROM THE US SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES WHICH VISITED DAMASCUS IN JANUARY BOTH EXPRESSED THEIR CONTINUED INTEREST IN THE POSSIBILITY OF FURTHER MARRIAGES TAKING PLACE.

A TOTAL OF 48 ADDITIONAL MARRIAGE PETITIONS HAVE BEEN AUTHENTICATED BY THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE AND SUBMITTED TO THE SYRIAN EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON FOR CERTIFICATION PRIOR TO THEIR TRANSMISSION TO SYRIA. AMBASSADOR QABBANI HAS DECLINED ROUTINE CERTIFICATION OF THESE PETITIONS AND HAS SUGGESTED TWO POSSIBLE COURSES OF ACTION: A) THAT THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE SEND HIM A LETTER LISTING THE 48 MARRIAGE PETITIONS ON THE BASIS OF WHICH HE WOULD SEEK INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS; OR B) THAT HE TRANSMIT THE 48
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MARRIAGE PETITIONS DIRECTLY TO THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS WITHOUT THE EMBASSY'S CERTIFICATION.

MR. STEVEN SHALOM, WHO WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN ARRANGING THE ORIGINAL MARRIAGES, PLANS TO RETURN TO DAMASCUS DURING THE FIRST HALF OF MARCH TO DISCUSS AND PURSUE THE MARRIAGE PROPOSAL PROGRAM.

WHEN I DISCUSSED THE SUBJECT OF THE ORIGINAL GROUP WITH PRESIDENT ASSAD AT OUR MEETING ON NOVEMBER 29, I SAID I EXPECTED THAT FURTHER MARRIAGE PROPOSALS WOULD BE FORTHCOMING FOR OTHER MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY. THE PRESIDENT REITERATED HE STOOD BY HIS PROMISE TO PRESIDENT CARTER TO BE HELPFUL IN INDIVIDUAL CASES.

APPROVAL FOR FURTHER SUCH MARRIAGES WILL BE VIEWED AS A HUMANITARIAN GESTURE AND MUCH APPRECIATED BY THOSE AMERICANS WHO HAVE FOLLOWED THIS SUBJECT MOST CLOSELY. SUCH APPROVAL WILL ALSO BE HELPFUL TO PRESIDENT CARTER AND THOSE OF US WHO ARE WORKING FOR CLOSER COOPERATION AND BETTER UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN SYRIA AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

I WOULD APPRECIATE RECEIVING THE MINISTRY'S VIEWS REGARDING THE NEXT STEPS TO TAKE IN THIS MATTER.
END OF AIDE MEMOIRE

4. WE FOLLOWED UP WITH SHOEFI MARCH 2 AFTER RECEIVING YOUR SECOND CABLE. HE PROMISED TO CHECK WITH AL KHANI AND KEEP MATTER MOVING.

5. APPRECIATE YOUR POINT THAT SOLARZ IS BEING VERY HELPFUL IN PRESERVING SYRIAN SSA AGAINST CRITICS BUT DOUBT WE WILL ADVANCE MATTERS BY MENTIONING THIS DIRECTLY TO SYRIANS. DUE IN LARGE PART TO AMBASSADOR QABBANI'S REPORT SOLARZ HAS A VERY BAD NAME HERE AND I FEEL SYRIANS WOULD ONLY SEE DARK, ULTERIOR MOTIVES IN HIS ACTIONS. I AM REASONABLY CONFIDENT, HOWEVER, THAT AL KHANI AT LEAST HAS GRASPED RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SYRIAN ACTIONS ON JEWISH QUESTION AND SSA PROGRAM. CONFIDENTIAL

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IN ADDITION, I WILL PERSONALLY DISCUSS THE POINTS IN MY AIDE MEMOIRE TO KHADDAM WHOM I EXPECT TO SEE SHORTLY AFTER MY MEETING WITH ATHERTON THIS COMING WEEKEND.

6. AGREE THAT IF QABBANI HAS RECEIVED NO WORD FROM HERE BY TIME OF YOUR LUNCH WITH HIM MARCH 3 BEST COURSE WOULD BE FOR YOU TO SEND PETITIONS TO US WITHOUT SYRIAN EMBASSY CERTIFICATION. THEY WILL THEN BE HERE IN TIME FOR PRESENTATION DURING SHALOM VISIT. WITH THIS IN MIND WE SEE NO REASON WHY SHALOM SHOULD POSTPONE HIS ANTICIPATED ARRIVAL MARCH 4. EMBASSY WILL PLAN TO MEET HIM AT AIRPORT. WE HAVE RESERVED TWO ROOMS AT MERIDIEN. MURPHY

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